

# The Book of 1 Samuel

## Background and Introduction

The author of 1&2 Samuel is not definitively known or stated. The book of 1 Samuel covers the period from the end of the time of the judges to the end of the life of Saul. Likely, the events of the first seven chapters of 1 Samuel occur concurrently with the life of Samson, who also contended with the Philistines who oppressed God's people for 40 years (Judges 13:11). This lends depth to the parallel between Samson and Samuel, both Nazarites born of once-barren mothers. This context also helps us to remember that this book, especially the events of the first section, falls in the setting of the dark time of the judges.

## Purpose and Theological Theme

YHWH, the true KING of Israel, raises up the King after His own heart.

## Structure

The structure of the book is as follows:

- I. The Final Judge (1 Samuel 1:1-7:17)
- II. The Peoples' King (1 Samuel 8:1-15:35)
- III. The Lord's Anointed (1 Samuel 16:1-31:13)

## I. The Final Judge of Israel (1 Samuel 1:1-7:17)

### 1. The Call of Samuel (1:1-3:21)

#### A. Birth and Dedication of Samuel (1:1-1:28)

The book opens with a drama regarding two Levite families, vs. 1,

1 Samuel 1:1–3: "1 Now there was a certain man from Ramathaim-Zophim from the hill country of Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. 2 Now he had two wives: the name of one was Hannah and the name of the other Peninnah, and **Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.** 3 Now that man would go up from his city **yearly to worship and to sacrifice to Yahweh of hosts in Shiloh.** And the two sons of **Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas, were priests to Yahweh there.**"

So we have Elkanah and his two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Again, polygamy, which was a regular practice in the Ancient Near East, is not here condemned. However, each time we see polygamy in the Bible, it is always painted in a negative light. Even though Elkanah resides in the Ephraimite region of Judah, in 1 Chronicles 6:33-38, we see an extensive genealogy of Samuel that places him in the family of Kohath, the son of Levi.

Elkanah and his family leave from their back-water country town of Ramathaim-Zophim down to Shiloh, the resting place of the Tabernacle. We encounter the second Levite family there -

the priests Eli and his sons Hophni and Phinehas. Beginning in verse 6, we meet Elkanah and his family at the Tabernacle,

1 Samuel 1:6–11: "6 Her rival, however, would **provoke her bitterly to irritate her because Yahweh had closed her womb.** 7 And so it would happen year after year, as often as she went up to the house of Yahweh, she would provoke her; so she wept and would not eat. 8 Then Elkanah, her husband, said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep and why do you not eat, and why is your heart sad? Am I not better to you than ten sons?" 9. Hannah rose after eating and drinking in Shiloh. Now Eli, the priest, was sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the Temple of Yahweh. **10 And she, bitter of soul, prayed to Yahweh and wept despondently.**

Here, we see several allusions to past Biblical events. Like Rachel and Leah, there is strife between the barren favorite wife, Hannah, and Penninah, who is not barren and uses her child-bearing ability as a tool to hurt Hannah.

The author also notes that Hannah's soul is imbibittered - *marat* - which should make you think of the widow Naomi from the previous book, who changes her name to Mara after the death of her family. Unlike Naomi, instead of bitterly proclaiming God's sovereign hand over her state of suffering, Hannah turns to the sovereign God in prayer and weeping, vs. 11

1 Samuel 1:11 11 And she made a vow and said, "**O Yahweh of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a seed amongst men, then I will give him to Yahweh all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come on his head.**"

First, she calls God - YHWH of hosts - King of the heavenly armies. She brings her needs before God by recognizing that He is sovereign and has the power and authority to change her situation. Secondly, she prays knowing her station before YHWH; she calls herself "your maidservant," demonstrating her humility and understanding that her life is not her own.

Lastly, she prays with a faith that remembers and recalls God's faithfulness to help his people in the past - to look on her affliction as He did for His afflicted people in Egypt,

Exodus 3:7: "7 And Yahweh said, "**I have surely seen the affliction of My people** who are in Egypt, and I have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sufferings."

Similarly, she calls on God to remember her, just as He remembered the barren Rachel (Genesis 30:22). Meanwhile, the great High Priest of Israel, Eli, has no idea what is going on with this woman praying before the Tabernacle, vs. 12,

1 Samuel 1:12–14: "12 Now it happened, as she multiplied her praying before Yahweh, that **Eli was watching her mouth.** 13 As for Hannah, she was speaking in her heart; only her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard. So **Eli thought she was drunk.**"

Here, we see the first indication of Eli's lack of perception of the things of God. He thinks this praying woman is drunk, which should also give us an idea of the general character of men and women he would encounter during this period of the judges. Praying in the Temple should have been an everyday occurrence. Sadly, what Eli likely saw more often was the bumbling, incoherent ramblings of the inebriated. But in verse 19, we see Hannah's prayer answered,

1 Samuel 1:19–20: "19 Then they arose early in the morning and worshiped before Yahweh and turned back and came to their house in Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah, his wife, **and Yahweh remembered her**. 20 Now it happened in due time that Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son, and **she named him Samuel, saying, "Because I have asked him of Yahweh."**

The author writes that in answering her request, YHWH remembered her. Remember, this idea of God remembering doesn't imply that God forgot about Hannah. This language brings the idea of *placing particular thought and care upon a person*, placing Hannah in the forefront of His mind. We first see this with Noah in the Ark,

Genesis 8:1, "Then **God remembered Noah** and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark; and God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the water subsided."

This language is also used for Abraham (Genesis 19:29), the nation of Israel in Egypt (Exodus 2:24). She recognizes this reality in the name she gives her son Samuel - God hears. God remembered her, He heard her request, and He answered.

### B. Hannah's Song (2:1-10)

Hannah bursts into a theologically rich song after bringing Samuel to the Tabernacle and dedicating him to the Lord. This song lays the foundation and paradigm for understanding the theme and narrative of 1&2 Samuel. It is divided into three stanzas, beginning with verses 1-3,

1 Samuel 2:1–3: "1 Then Hannah prayed and said, "**My heart exults in Yahweh; My horn is exalted in Yahweh; My mouth speaks boldly against my enemies** Because I am glad in Your salvation. 2 "There is no one holy like Yahweh; Indeed, there is no one besides You, **Nor is there any rock like our God.** 3 "**Do not multiply speaking so very proudly; Let arrogance not come out of your mouth; For Yahweh is a God of knowledge,** And with Him, actions are weighed."

She rejoices in her heart - the seat of her emotion, will, and her horn - a symbol of her strength not in herself but in YHWH. She praises and boasts in YHWH with her entire personhood. This boast leads her to deride her enemies who exult not in the Lord but in their own strength. Her act directly contrasts the boasting and the provoking of her rival wife, Peninnah. She calls YHWH her Rock. He is her source of strength and the foundation in Whom she can trust. This phrase is a direct reference to the Song of Moses, Deuteronomy 32,

Deuteronomy 32:30–31: "30 "How could one pursue one thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, **Unless their Rock had sold them,** And Yahweh had handed them over? 31 "**Indeed their rock is not like our Rock,** even our enemies themselves judge this."

Since no one is like YHWH, men and women should not multiply in speech, boast, or speak highly of their own might and autonomy. This phrase reads literally - do not multiply in tall, tall speech - which we should remember when we encounter the tall characters of this book. Lastly, she knows that God is a God of knowledge. Man might look at height or strength, but God knows the intent of everyone's actions. He knows the heart.

Hannah then looks beyond her situation of Divine reversal to sing about how God will accomplish this work throughout His creation vs. 4,

1 Samuel 2:4–6: "4 **"The bows of the mighty are shattered, but those who stumble gird on strength.** 5 "Those who were full hire themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry cease to hunger. Even the barren gives birth to seven, but she who has many children languishes. 6 **"Yahweh puts to death and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up."**

Here, we see God shatter the weapons of the mighty and strengthen the weak. Hamilton notes that this is the foundational verse of 1 Samuel. We will see God break down the mighty and the strong and raise the feeble and lowly. God will take those who are well-fed, fat, and happy and cause them to starve, meanwhile feeding the hungry.

Why will God cause the proud to stumble and grant this grace to the humble? He is the one who has all the authority. He is the KING who rules over death and life itself. This reference again is a reference to the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32,

Deuteronomy 32:39: "39 'See now that I, **I am He, And there is no god besides Me; It is I who put to death and give life.** I have wounded, and it is I who heal, And there is no one who can deliver from My hand."

Before we move on, notice the seed of resurrection theology here - that God's power to reverse extends to raising one from the dead. He has the power to reverse death itself.

We see a parallel stanza compared to the previous three verses in verses 7-10. Here, we have a repetition of God's authority to reverse. But this stanza concludes with something different, with a future looking - eschatological statement about the King, verse 7,

1 Samuel 2:7–8: "7 **"Yahweh makes poor and rich; He brings low; He also exalts. 8 "He raises the poor from the dust; He exalts the needy from the ash heap To make them sit with nobles, And inherit a seat of glory; For the pillars of the earth are Yahweh's, And He set the world on them."**

Who has the authority to make one poor or rich? The KING. Who has the power to raise the poor and exalt the needy to a position of glory? The KING. What is the basis for His authority and power? He is the God who created the universe. The foundations of the earth belong to who? The KING. He's the One who made it all, and so He is the One who rules it all.

Verses 9-10 shift to look forward to God's ultimate reversal, vs. 9,

1 Samuel 2:9-10, **"He shall keep the feet of His holy ones, But the wicked ones shall be silenced in darkness, For not by power shall a man prevail. 10 "Those who contend with Yahweh will be dismayed; Against them, He will thunder in the heavens; Yahweh will render justice to the ends of the earth, And He will give strength to His king, And He will exalt the horn of His anointed."**

Ultimately, He will accomplish the salvation of His set-apart ones, keeping their feet from stumbling. Moreover, He will have victory over the wicked, who's boasting He will shut up in utter darkness. Why? It is not by their power that men prevail. Those who trust in their strength will be brought down. Those who trust in the Lord will be preserved. And in the end, justice will be accomplished throughout all the earth, for YHWH will empower His King and exalt His anointed - His *Messiah*. This mention of YHWH's Messiah is the first in Scripture. He is the King

who will accomplish the salvation of YHWH's holy ones and establish justice throughout YHWH's creation.

In Hannah's song, we see this: her answered prayer for a son, YHWH's reversal of her barrenness, was a foretaste of the reversal and redemption that God will work through His anointed King.

### C. Eli's Sons (2:11-36)

With the conclusion of Hannah's Magnificent, the narrative shifts to focusing on the second Levitical family of Eli and his sons, vs. 12,

1 Samuel 2:12–13: "12 Now the sons of Eli were **vile men; they did not know Yahweh.** 13 And this was the legal judgment for the priests with the people: when any man was offering a sacrifice, **the priest's young man would come while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand.**"

Notice that these Priests of YHWH did not know YHWH. This statement is shocking, for they serve before His presence at the Tabernacle. The author identifies them as vile men, which literally reads as "sons of Belial." They are seeds of the serpent. This reality is evidenced by their actions of violating the Lord's sacrifice. They took the sacrificial meal from the pot (vs. 14), consumed the fat of the sacrifice (which belonged to God) (vs. 16), and threatened the offerors with violence if they refused to comply (vs. 16).

These verses are intentionally contrasted with Samuel's work in the Temple, vs. 21,

1 Samuel 2:18: "18 Now **Samuel was ministering before Yahweh,** as a young boy **girded with a linen ephod.**"

Here is Samuel, ministering before YHWH, doing the work Eli's sons should have done. This verb ministering is unique to the priesthood, Exodus 28,

Exodus 28:1: "1 "Now as for you, bring near to yourself Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the sons of Israel, **to minister as priests to Me**—Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons."

Samuel was also clothed with the priestly garment of a linen ephod. As he does the work and wears the clothes of a priest, he continues to grow before YHWH and Hannah's reversal continues, vs. 21,

1 Samuel 2:21: "21 **Yahweh indeed visited Hannah,** and she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters. And the young boy **Samuel grew before Yahweh.**"

The focus on Samuel is interrupted with another report of the sins of Eli's sons, vs. 22,

1 Samuel 2:22–23: "22 Now Eli was very old, and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they **lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting.** 23 So he said to them, "**Why do you do such things, the evil things that I hear from all these people?**"

In Exodus 38:8, there is mention of women who serve the Lord at the doorway of the Tabernacle. But instead of serving YHWH, Eli's sons forced them to serve their immoral desires. This sin is particularly striking, for Phinehas's namesake was the famous grandson of Aaron, who righteously impaled an Israelite fornicating with a Moabite woman in front of the Tabernacle (Num 25:1-9). Notice also that the old man, Eli, has to hear of his son's sins as if he

is ignorant of their wickedness apart from the complaint of the people. He quickly assumes Hannah's depravity but can't see his sons' sins for himself. In response to the report, he merely asks them why they behave so.

In contrast again to Eli's sons who only grow in wickedness, Samuel continues to grow before YHWH and the people, vs. 26,

1 Samuel 2:26: "26 Now the young boy Samuel was **growing in stature and in favor both with Yahweh and with men.**"

After this interjection about Samuel, an unnamed prophet enters the scene to reveal God's word regarding the priesthood of Eli and his descendants, vs. 30,

1 Samuel 2:30–34: "30 "Therefore Yahweh, the God of Israel, declares, 'I did indeed say that your house and the house of your father should walk before Me forever'; but now Yahweh declares, **'Far be it from Me—for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be cursed.** 31 **'Behold, the days are coming, and I will break your strength and the strength of your father's house so that there will not be an old man in your house.** 32 'And you will look upon the distress of My habitation, in spite of all the good that I do for Israel; and an old man will not be in your house all the days. 33 'Yet I will not cut off every man of yours from My altar so that your eyes will fail from weeping and your soul grieve, and all the increase of your house will be put to death in the prime of life. 34 **'Now this will be the sign to you which will come concerning your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas: on the same day, both of them will be put to death.'**"

The reality that an unnamed prophet has to deliver this message shows that Eli is an utter failure. YHWH does not speak with him or through him. Instead, he and his descendants will have their priestly line broken off, beginning with his two sons, who will die on the same day. Eli is from the line of Ithamar. Solomon ultimately ends the Ithamaric priesthood in 1 Kings 2:26-27.

#### D. God's Call (3:1-21)

Samuel's role as a quasi-priest is stated in chapter 2, and in chapter 3, he is officially called a prophet.

1 Samuel 3:1–3: "1 Now the young boy **Samuel was ministering to Yahweh before Eli.** **And word from Yahweh was rare in those days;** visions were infrequent. 2 And it happened at that time as Eli was lying down in his place (**now his eyesight had begun to fade, and he could not see well**), 3 and the lamp **of God had not yet gone out,** and Samuel was lying down in the Temple of Yahweh where the Ark of God was,"

As we saw at the end of chapter 2, God's word no longer came to or through Eli. Here, we see that it was rare, visions were infrequent, and the light that is God's revelation seemed to be dimming as fast as Eli's eyesight. However, the lamp of God in the Tabernacle had not yet gone out. God was about to speak to the one who was there to hear him, Samuel.

The story is familiar. Samuel hears YHWH's call but thinks that it is Eli. Eli cannot hear and see what God is doing until God calls Samuel twice. But after receiving instruction from Eli on what he should do, Samuel goes back to the Tabernacle and waits for YHWH, vs. 10,

1 Samuel 3:10: "10 Then Yahweh came and stood and called as at other times, **"Samuel! Samuel!"** And Samuel said, **"Speak, for Your servant is listening."**

Here, we have the double call of God to His servant. Remember that it was Moses, the prototypical prophet, who was called by God in the burning bush, Exodus 3,

Exodus 3:4: "And Yahweh saw that he turned aside to look, so God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "**Moses, Moses!**" And he said, "**Here I am.**"

Similarly, Samuel calls himself the servant of YHWH. This title was given to Moses at his death. Samuel's call, response, and title resembled Moses'. For he is the first named prophet in Israel since Moses, vs. 20,

1 Samuel 3:20–21: "20 So all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of Yahweh. 21 And Yahweh appeared again at Shiloh because Yahweh revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of Yahweh."

Like Moses, Samuel the prophet was God's instrument to initiate a new era of Israel's history, beginning with the death of Eli's failed priesthood. These initial chapters show that the Ruler of Israel is not a man, not Eli, the priest, but YHWH. He is the One who reverses Hannah's situation and raises up his prophet Samuel. He is the One who will save His people from the dark age of the judges.

## 2. The Ark of God (4:1-7:17)

### A. The Ark Captured (4:1-5:12)

Fittingly, the newly called prophet fades into the background as the Glory of the Presence of the KING takes center stage for the following three chapters. Israel's conflict with the Philistines sets the background for this episode in Samuel. Two battles with the Canaanite nation surround the inner narrative of the Ark of God in Philistia.

In the first battle, the Battle of Aphek, the author demonstrates what happened when God's prophet was not yet leading, and God's Word was not yet listened to vs. 1,

1 Samuel 4:1–2: "1 Thus the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out to meet the Philistines in battle and camped beside Ebenezer, and the **Philistines camped in Aphek.** 2 And the Philistines arranged themselves to meet Israel. Then the battle spread, and **Israel was defeated before the Philistines who struck down about 4,000 men on the battlefield.**"

Aphek is in the region near Shiloh. This move was a strategic attack of the Philistines - they were heading for the Tabernacle, the source of Israel's identity and power. Victory at the House of God would demonstrate the superiority of their gods over Israel's God and would demoralize the nation, making them ripe for conquest. In the initial battle stage, Israel was promptly defeated by the Philistines - they were struck down - literally smitten by them. This defeat causes Israel to ponder the reason for their defeat, vs. 3,

1 Samuel 4:3a: "3 Then the people came into the camp, and the elders of Israel said, "**Why has Yahweh defeated us today before the Philistines?**"

They rightly concluded that it was YHWH who defeated them. However, instead of answering the question of why YHWH acted thus, instead of realizing it was for their corruption and idolatry, they come to a foolish conclusion. Verse 3b,

1 Samuel 4:3b-4: "Let us take to ourselves from **Shiloh the ark of the covenant of Yahweh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies.**" 4 So the people sent to Shiloh, and from there they carried the **Ark of the covenant of**

**Yahweh of hosts** who sits above the cherubim; and **the two sons of Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas, were there with the Ark of the covenant of God.**"

The Israelites wrongly concluded that God was a lucky rabbit's foot that they forgot to bring along to battle. They summoned the Ark of God to force YHWH to grant them victory to protect His honor. In their logic, to have God's furniture was to have God's power. They summon the "Ark of the covenant of YHWH of hosts" to do their bidding. This statement is contrasted with Hannah, who humbly pleaded with faith upon YHWH of Hosts to look at her affliction and answer her prayer.

The picture then shifts from the ominous sight of the cursed sons of Eli carrying the Ark into the Israelite camp to the camp of the Philistine army. It is there that we see yet another contrast, vs. 7,

1 Samuel 4:7–8: "7 And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "**God has come into the camp.**" And they said, "Woe to us! Nothing like this has happened before. 8 "**Woe to us! Who shall deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness.**"

Israel irreverently sought to use God as a good luck charm. The Philistines are filled with fear and woe at the presence of YHWH. They are almost reserved to their inevitable fate of death and defeat at the hand of the God who struck down - smote - the mighty Egyptians. Notice that Israel forgets to pray to God for aid or even bring Him to the battle. The Philistines remember all God had done for Israel hundreds of years before. Predictably, Israel's plan fails, vs 10,

1 Samuel 4:10–11: "10 So the Philistines fought, **and Israel was defeated,** and every man fled to his tent, and the slaughter was very great, **for there fell of Israel 30,000 foot soldiers.** 11 **And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.**"

Notice that in the final statement, we see God's purpose in allowing defeat. Israel planned to bring the Ark as a key to victory, but YHWH used it to carry out His decree of Hophni and Phinehas's same-day death. Moreover, God accomplishes His plan to remove Eli from the priesthood that day. As news of the Ark's capture reaches Eli, he goes into shock, falls off his chair, and breaks his neck. Eli, the failed priest and judge, is dethroned. The Lord brings low and topples those who are full and fat. The scene of this first battle ends with the birth of Eli's grandson, vs. 21,

1 Samuel 4:21: "21 And she called the boy Ichabod, saying, "**The glory has departed from Israel,**" because the Ark of God was taken and because of her father-in-law and her husband."

She names him Ichabod - literally "where is the glory" or "the glory has been exiled." The capture of the Ark meant the exile of YHWH's glory. Commentator James Jordan notes that "the Mosaic Tabernacle, once destroyed, was never put back together again. The Mosaic Tabernacle was set up during David's reign at Gibeon (1 Chr. 16:37–39), but the Ark was never put back inside." The Tabernacle without the Ark became merely a beautiful tent.



## B. The Ark in Philistia (5:1-12)

The scene then shifts to the chief of the five cities of Philistia, Ashdod, where the Ark of God is set up as a war trophy before their chief god, Dagon. The message was clear: Dagon has defeated YHWH, or so they thought, vs. 3,

1 Samuel 5:3: "3 Then the Ashdodites arose early the next morning, and behold, **Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the Ark of Yahweh. So they took Dagon and set him in his place again.**"

As at the first Passover, God defeats the foreign idols at night. The Dagonite priests enter the Temple and find their god bowing down before the Ark of YHWH. Comically, their strong and mighty fish god needs divine paramedics to help him up from his fall. But poor Dagon couldn't stay upright, vs. 4,

1 Samuel 5:4: "4 But they arose early the next morning, and behold, **Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the Ark of Yahweh. And the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off on the threshold;** only the trunk of Dagon was left to him."

The priests come in the following day to find their chief god lying before the Ark of YHWH, decapitated and dismembered. In the first of several head wounds in 1 Samuel, Dagon's head was crushed by the true KING. Their dead idol is dead, with no head and no hands. Not content with merely crushing their god, YHWH carries out His victory throughout Philistia. His exile turned into a victory procession in the land of the enemy as the presence of the Ark brings plagues upon the cities of the Philistines, vs. 6,

1 Samuel 5:6: "6 Now the **hand of Yahweh was glorious** against the Ashdodites, and **He made them desolate and struck them with tumors**, both Ashdod and its territories."

The hand of Dagon had no power. He doesn't have hands anymore. Who has real power? YHWH, the true KING. His hand is glorious, and His power extends throughout Philistia, for the earth is His and everything in it.

After foolishly sending the Ark throughout the land, thus spreading the plague of YHWH to all of Philistia, they conclude that they need to send the Ark back, vs. 11,

1 Samuel 5:11: "11 They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines and said, **"Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place so that it will not put us and our people to death."** For there was a deadly confusion throughout the city; **the hand of God was very glorious there.**"

Again, Israel can't comprehend, understand, or revere God and His glory. This attitude is contrasted once more with the Philistine fear and understanding of the glory of the presence of God.

## C. The Ark Returned (6:1-7:1)

Recalling the Exodus, the Philistine priests warned that the Ark should be returned with treasure, vs. 4,

1 Samuel 6:3-6: "3 So they said, "If you send away the Ark of the God of Israel, **do not send it empty; but you shall surely return to Him a guilt offering.** Then you will be healed, and it will be known to you why His hand is not turned away from you." 4 Then

they said, "What shall be the guilt offering which we shall return to Him?" And they said, "Five golden tumors and five golden mice **according to the number of the lords of the Philistines, for one plague was on all of you and on your lords.** 5 "So you shall make likenesses of your tumors and likenesses of your mice that bring the land to ruin, and **you shall give glory to the God of Israel**; perhaps He will ease His hand from you, your gods, and your land. 6 "Why then do you **harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts?** When He had abused them, did they not allow the people to go, and they went?"

They offer a guilt offering, for they rightly understood that they had trespassed against God. According to Leviticus 5-6, the guilt offering was prescribed for trespassing with God's holy things. They acted this way, for they feared the outcome of the Egyptians. So, instead of hardening hearts like Pharaoh, they give glory to the God of Israel.

Once more, this is contrasted with Israel's forgetfulness. Their failure to remember is seen by their incompetence when the Ark arrives, vs. 15,

1 Samuel 6:14–15: "14 And the cart came into the field of Joshua the Beth-shemite and stood there, and a large stone was there, and they split the wood of the cart and **offered the cows as a burnt offering to Yahweh.** 15 And **the Levites** took down the Ark of Yahweh, and the box that was with it, in which were the articles of gold, and **put them on the large stone**; and the men of Beth-Shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices that day to Yahweh."

Beth-Shemesh was a Levitical city explicitly given to the family of Aaron (Joshua 21:13-16). This was a promising place to receive the Ark from all the cities. However, the Levites violated God's instructions for burnt offerings by slaughtering the female cows that carried the Ark instead of bulls (Lev 1:3). Then, instead of covering the Ark immediately (Num 4:5), they put it on the nearest rock out of convenience. Then, in verse 19, they commit the most heinous of violations,

1 Samuel 6:19: "19 Then He struck down some of the men of Beth-shemesh **because they had looked into the Ark of Yahweh. He struck down of all the people, 50,070 men,** and the people mourned because Yahweh had struck the people with a great slaughter."

Some of the men there failed to obey the Priestly instructions for handling the Ark of Numbers 4,

Numbers 4:20: "20 but they **shall not go in to see the holy objects even for a moment, or they will die.**"

Just as the Philistines struck down Israel, these irreverent Israelites were struck down by YHWH. At the beginning of this episode, they treat the Ark as a talisman to twist God for their purposes, and they get struck down by the Philistines. When the Ark returns, they treat it as a spectacle for entertainment and get struck down by YHWH. Who can stand before the Holy King? Not dead Dagon, not plagued Philistia, and not irreverent Israel.

#### D. The Judgeship of Samuel (7:2-17)

Thankfully, in chapter 7, Samuel enters the stage again, vs. 2,

1 Samuel 7:2–4: "2 Now it happened from the day when the Ark remained at Kiriath-Jearim, **that the time was long; it was twenty years. And all the house of Israel**

**lamented after Yahweh.** 3 Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, **"If you are to return to Yahweh with all your heart, then remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and set your hearts toward Yahweh and serve Him alone; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines."** 4 So the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroth and served Yahweh alone."

After over two decades of preaching and calling Israel to repentance, Israel finally hears the message. Israel was lamenting and mourning, and Samuel called them to add tangible actions of repentance to their sorrow. He called them to remove the idols and return to YHWH.

With the return of the Ark and Israel's repentance in the background, we come to the second battle, the Battle of Ebenezer. At Aphek, the Philistines hear of the Ark and fear. At Ebenezer, Israel was the army to hear and fear, vs. 7,

1 Samuel 7:7: "7 Then the Philistines heard that the sons of Israel had gathered to Mizpah. And the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. **Then the sons of Israel heard it and were afraid of the Philistines.**"

At Aphek, Israel merely summoned the presence of YHWH to ensure their victory. At Ebenezer, they ask Samuel to cry out to YHWH, their God, vs. 8,

1 Samuel 7:8: "8 So the sons of Israel said to Samuel, **"Do not cease to cry out to Yahweh our God for us, that He may save** us from the hand of the Philistines."

At Aphek, the Philistines heard, feared, and then attacked. At Ebenezer, Israel heard, feared, and prayed, and God heard and answered, vs. 9,

1 Samuel 7:9-10: "9 And Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it for a whole burnt offering to Yahweh, and **Samuel cried out to Yahweh for Israel, and Yahweh answered him.** 10 Now Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, and the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. But **Yahweh thundered with a great thunder on that day against the Philistines and confused them so that they were struck down before Israel.**"

Instead of being struck down by the Philistines, the Philistines were struck down by YHWH's thunder, which was sung of by Hannah,

1 Samuel 2:10: "10 **"Those who contend with Yahweh will be dismayed; Against them He will thunder in the heavens..."**

Instead of the glory leaving Israel, Samuel raises an Ebenezer, vs. 12,

1 Samuel 7:12: "12 Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and **he named it Ebenezer. And he said, "Thus far, Yahweh has helped us."**

The word Ebenezer means "the Rock of help." This phrase again echoes Hannah's song,

1 Samuel 2:1-2: "1 Then Hannah prayed and said, "My heart exults in Yahweh; My horn is exalted in Yahweh; My mouth speaks boldly against my enemies **Because I am glad in Your salvation.** 2 **"There is no one holy like Yahweh; Indeed, there is no one besides You, Nor is there any rock like our God."**

This victory marked a complete reversal of the conquest of the Philistines vs. 13,

1 Samuel 7:13–15: "13 So the Philistines were subdued, and **they did not come anymore within the border of Israel. And the hand of Yahweh was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. 14 And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel,** from Ekron even to Gath; and Israel delivered their territory from the hand of the Philistines. So, there was peace between Israel and the Amorites. 15 **Thus Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.**"

The outcome of Ebenezer was different because the leadership was different. Aphek happened amid Eli's failure and his son's wickedness. Ebenezer happened amid the Word of God coming through Samuel, amid godly grief and true repentance—the result of Samuel's judgeship: restoration of all that was lost and peace from Philistia.

### Christ Connection

Now, this episode in 1 Samuel foreshadows Israel's future; God brings covenant curses on Israel and deploys His Philistine hosts against His rebellious people - destroying the Tabernacle in the process.

However, the capture of the Ark did not just point to the future reality of the destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians and the Romans. It also gives another **early picture of the substitutionary sacrifice of the Son of God.**

The Defeat at Aphek was merely a prelude to the victory of YHWH, who took on the curse for His people to bring about their salvation. According to Deuteronomy 28, Israel's curse for their idolatry and utter wickedness should have ended in their exile,

Deuteronomy 28:64: "64 "Moreover, **Yahweh will scatter you among all peoples,** from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth; and **there you shall serve other gods, wood, and stone, which you or your fathers have not known.**"

Remember that the Ark was where the presence of YHWH dwelt above the cherubim. It was called the Mercy Seat of God, on which the annual sacrifice for the Day of Atonement was made. It is the place where the curse of God's people is born. So then, God does here in 1 Samuel instead of Israel going into exile. He took the curse of the covenant for His people. In this exile, YHWH defeated their enemies. He made their god bow down to Him before crushing his head. Then He returns in a Second Exodus to the Promised Land, bringing His people treasure and definitive victory, salvation, restoration, and lasting peace.

## **II. The Peoples' King (1 Samuel 8:1-15:35)**

### Excursus on a Biblical Theology of Kingship

It is crucial to begin this chapter by reviewing the kingship theology established thus far in Scripture. As has been established in Hannah's Hymn, YHWH is the true and ultimate KING of the universe, for He is the One who made it and sustains it. He has the divine right to rule as Creator God.

Yet, as we see in the creation of Adam, God delegates His kingly authority to a human king. He creates Adam in His image. He places Him in the Garden, the capital city of creation, and then gives him the mandate to have dominion over all the earth (Genesis 1:26-28).

In Genesis 3, Adam fails to uphold his authority and instead allows Satan to usurp it, plunging all creation into a curse. However, in Genesis 3:15, God promises that a Seed of the woman, one in the mold of Adam, shall crush the head of Satan, thus redeeming all creation. The book of Genesis tracks the line of the Seed of the Woman through Seth, Noah, Shem, and Abraham. It was then promised to Abraham that Kings would come from his offspring (Genesis 17:6-8). Then, as the book of Genesis closes, a prophecy is made about one of Abraham's great-grandsons, Judah, that the Scepter and Ruler's staff shall not depart from him and that all the world will obey him (Genesis 49:10).

In the book of Numbers, we find reference to this kingly figure in the oracle of the mercenary prophet Balaam. He foretold of a shining star rising out of Jacob, exercising dominion over Israel and all the neighboring nations around the Promised Land (Numbers 24:17-24).

Then, in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses gives instructions for the office of a king, which had yet to be established (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). The King was not to rely upon his own strength by not multiplying the three G's - gold, gals (wives), and giddy-up (horses). Instead, he was to be a man of the Word of God. He was to write down a copy of the Law of God, indicating that He was to rule according to the rules of the KING, to be a new Adam who ruled under the Ruler of the Universe.

Lastly, as we saw at the beginning of this book, in the Magnificent of Hannah, YHWH will empower His King and exult His anointed, thus bringing about victorious salvation for His people, executing judgment upon His enemies, and establishing justice once more throughout the whole earth.

## 1. Transition to the Monarchy (8:1-12)

With all of this in mind, we come to the transition of Israel from a theocracy (God's rule) to a monarchy, vs. 4,

1 Samuel 8:4–5: "4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; 5 and they said to him, "Behold, **you have grown old**, and your sons do not walk in your ways. **Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.**"

Samuel has been judged for many years. He's getting old. His sons are like Eli's sons. They don't know YHWH. And so the Israelites are getting nervous. And the question is: in light of what God has already established regarding a king, what is wrong with this request for a king? Did Moses not say in the introduction to the Law of the King,

Deuteronomy 17:14–15: "14 "When you enter the land which Yahweh your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, **'I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,**' 15 you shall surely **set a king over you whom Yahweh**

**your God chooses**, one from among your brothers you shall set as King over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your brother."

God had ordained for this very situation. So why is Samuel aggrieved about their request, vs. 7, 1 Samuel 8:7: "7 Then Yahweh said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, **for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them.**"

They haven't rejected Samuel as their judge. In making their request, Israel has rejected the Theocracy. They have rejected the KING. They wish to perform a coup, vs. 19,

1 Samuel 8:19–20: "19 Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, "No, but there shall be a king over us, 20 that we also may be like all the nations, **that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.**"

Here, we see the sinful heart of the matter. Israel doesn't just want a king like all the nations. They don't want a king of YHWH's choosing. Throughout His revelation, God established that Israel was to have a King who ruled according to and under the authority of the KING. God's design in creating Adam was to establish a Theocratic Monarchy - for the human King to reign as His representative. Israel did not want a theocratic monarchy. They wanted a simple monarchy with a king to judge them and fight their battles **instead of God**. And they window dressed their desire with the language of the Law of Moses. This request is especially tragic when viewed in the context of the amazing victory God had just accomplished against the Philistines.

## 2. Saul Made King (9:1-12:25)

### A. Saul's Search (9:1-10:27)

And so, God gives them the King they deserve, chapter 9:1,

1 Samuel 9:1–2: "1 Now there **was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish** the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Becorath, the son of Aphiah, the son of a Benjamite, **a mighty man of valor**. 2 Now he had a son whose name was Saul, **a choice and handsome man, and there was not a more handsome person than he among the sons of Israel; from his shoulders and up he was taller than any of the people.**"

Saul is the guy. He has the pedigree of a mighty man. He has the good looks of a king. Most importantly, he has the stature of the King. He's head and shoulders **taller** than all the other Israelite males.

He looks the part of the King, but the question is: does he play the part? The chapter proceeds to tell of Saul's search for the lost donkeys. His father's donkeys had wandered off their field into one about 300 feet away. However, Saul travels all over Israel to find these quasi-lost donkeys. In this story, the author is making the point that Saul doesn't know how to tend livestock - he doesn't know how to *shepherd*.

During the donkey search, Saul providentially encounters Samuel, who anoints him with oil and provides signs indicating his anointing as King, each of which comes to pass.

Samuel then assembles Israel to crown their King, Chapter 10:21,

1 Samuel 10:21–22: "21 Then he brought the tribe of Benjamin near by its families, and the Matrite family was taken. And Saul, the son of Kish, was taken, but they looked for him, and **he could not be found**. 22 Therefore, they inquired further of Yahweh, "Has the man come here yet?" So, Yahweh said, "**Behold, he is hiding himself by the baggage.**"

The time has come to crown their King, and he's cowering in fear amongst the baggage.

Remember this hiding spot. Once he is found, Samuel presents him before the people, vs. 24,

1 Samuel 10:24: "24 And Samuel said to all the people, "**Do you see him whom Yahweh has chosen? Surely, there is no one like him among all the people.**" So, everyone shouted and said, "Long live the king!"

Samuel incredulously asks, do you see him? Saul is not hard to miss. As Samuel says, there is no one like him. Most of the people rejoicingly accept the YHWH's choice, except for a few nay-sayers who proclaim vs. 27,

1 Samuel 10:27: "27 But certain **vile men** said, "**How can this one save us?**" And they despised him and did not bring him any present. But he kept silent."

Notice that these men are vile. This was the same language used to describe Eli's sons - these, too, are sons of Belial.

### [B. Saul's Test \(11:1-15\)](#)

After the coronation, Saul faces his first test of kingship when his relatives are attacked.

Chapter 11:1,

1 Samuel 11:1–2: "1 And Nahash the Ammonite came up and **besieged Jabesh-Gilead**; and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, "**Cut a covenant with us, and we will serve you.**" 2 But Nahash the Ammonite said to them, "I will cut it with you on this condition, **that I will gouge out the right eye of every one of you**; thus I will make it a reproach on all Israel."

Remember that Jabesh-Gilead was the town of the 400 virgins who were taken by the tribe of Benjamin, by Saul's tribe, to be wives (Judges 21:1-14). These are Saul's people whom the Ammonites are besieging. So where is their King who will fight their battles? Vs. 5,

1 Samuel 11:5: "5 Now behold, **Saul was coming from the field behind the oxen**, and he said, "What is the matter with the people that they weep?" So they recounted to him the words of the men of Jabesh."

Saul has no idea what is happening in his kingdom because he is too tilling his farm. The Spirit of God intervenes upon the King and empowers him to unite the tribes of Israel against the Ammonites whom he utterly routes. After his victory, the people seek out the sons of Belial, who derided Saul, vs. 12,

1 Samuel 11:12–13: "12 Then the people said to Samuel, "Who is he that said, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Bring the men, that we may put them to death." 13 But Saul said, "**Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today Yahweh has accomplished salvation in Israel.**"

Saul spares the sons of Belial, the seeds of the serpent who wish to contend with the King. This mercy is the opposite of what his people expect and what the Seed of the Woman should do.

### C. Samuel's Sermon (12:1-25)

In chapter 12, the episode of Saul's establishment as King closes with a final address of Israel's last judge. In his sermon, he recounts Israel's history under the rule of Moses, Aaron, and the judges. He reviews the historical pattern of Israel being given into the hand of their enemies, which led to them crying out for salvation, and YHWH sending a judge to save them, vs. 11,

1 Samuel 12:11–13: "11 "Then Yahweh sent Jerubbaal and Bedan and Jephthah and Samuel, and **He delivered you from the hands of your enemies all around, so that you lived in security.** 12 "But you saw that Nahash the king of the sons of Ammon came against you, and you said to me, **'No, but a king shall reign over us,' although Yahweh your God was your King.** 13 "So now, behold, the king whom you have chosen, whom you have asked for, and behold, Yahweh has set a king over you."

His point is that Saul did the same thing with the Ammonites. Israel wanted something different, and instead, they received the same salvation but at the cost of a King who takes and takes.

He concludes his judgeship of Israel by giving a final instruction and warning, vs. 24,

1 Samuel 12:24–25: "24 "Only **fear Yahweh and serve Him in truth with all your heart;** for see what great things He has done for you. 25 "But **if you still do wickedly, both you and your king will be swept away.**"

He calls on Israel to fear YHWH, to serve Him, and to do so with all their heart. Essentially, he is calling on them to treat YHWH as their KING. He has always been faithful to do great things for His people.

However, he warns that if they continue their trajectory, they and the King they so desperately wanted to replace God with will be removed from the Promised Land into exile. It is clear that Israel received the King that they wanted and that they deserved. But praise be to God, the King after God's own heart is coming soon.